EXPERIMENTAL GEOGRAPHY

Welcome to Garbage City

Garbage Education Display System (Garbage City & Landfill vs. Incinerator), Damon Rich for the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), 2002-08

Guest curated by Nato Thompson
Organized by iCi (Independent Curators International)
Oct. 9, 2009 - Jan. 31, 2010

ARTISTS: Francis Alÿs AREA Chicago The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) kanarinka (Catherine D’Ignazio) e-Xplo Ilana Halperin Julia Meltzer and David Thorne Lize Mogel Multiplicity Trevor Paglen Raqs Media Collective Ellen Rothenberg Spurse Deborah Stratman Daniel Tucker Alex Villar Yin Xiuzhen

Oct. 16, Fri. 6-8pm: A Continental Reception
Nov. 14, Sat. 9pm: The Body Double Explorers Club @ The Waffle Shop, 124 S. Highland Ave. at Baum
Jan. 28-30, 2010 Thurs.-Sat.: Contestational Cartographies Symposium @ Carnegie Mellon University + Brillobox Upstairs, organized by the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry + Miller Gallery
Jan. 28, 2010 Thurs. 5pm: School of Art Lecture Series: Trevor Paglen @ McConomy Auditorium, Carnegie Mellon University Center, 5000 Forbes Ave.

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Experimental Geography is an exhibition that explores the distinctions between geographical study and artistic experience of the earth, as well as the juncture where the two realms collide (and possibly make a new field altogether). The exhibition presents a panoramic view of this new practice through a wide range of mediums including interactive computer units, sound and video installations, photography, sculpture, and experimental cartography created by 19 artists or artist teams from six countries as well as the United States.

Geography benefits from the study of specific histories, sites, and memories. Every estuary, landfill, and cul-de-sac has a story to tell. The task of the geographer is to alert us to what is directly in front of us, while the task of the experimental geographer—an amalgam of scientist, artist, and explorer—is to do so in a manner that deploys aesthetics, ambiguity, poetry, and a dash of empiricism.

The manifestations of “experimental geography” (a term coined by geographer Trevor Paglen in 2002) run the gamut of contemporary art practice today: sewn cloth cities that spill out of suitcases, buses tours through water treatment centers, performers climbing up the sides of buildings, and sound art of the breaths exhaled in running Boston’s evacuation route. In the hands of contemporary artists, the study of humanity’s engagement with the earth’s surface becomes a riddle best solved in experimental fashion.

The approaches used by the artists featured in Experimental Geography range from a poetic conflation of humanity and the earth to more empirical studies of our planet. Francis Alÿs, in collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Cusumá Tempeque Medina, and 500 volunteers, created a human coin to move a sand dune outside Lima, Peru. Although the actual displacement was infinitesimal, its metaphorical resonance was colossal. Creating projects that are more empirically minded, the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI), a research organization, explores the nature and extent of human interaction with the earth’s surface, embracing a multidisciplinary approach to fulfilling its mission. Using skill sets culled from the toolbox of geography, CLUI forces a reading of the American landscape (which includes man-made islands, submerged cities, traffic in Los Angeles, and the broadcast antennas in the San Gabriel Mountains) that refamiliarizes the viewer with the overlooked details of their everyday experience.

Nato Thompson is a curator at Creative Time, as well as a writer and activist. Among his public projects for Creative Time are Waiting for Godot in New York, a project by Paul Chan in collaboration with The Classical Theatre of Harlem, and Democracy in America: The National Campaign. Thompson was formerly a curator at MASS MoCA, where his exhibitions included The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere and Ahistoric Occasion. The Interventionists ran the gamut of contemporary aesthetics, ambiguity, poetry, and a dash of empiricism.

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